

## President's proposal would broaden process

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The University of California Regents will discuss a controversial proposal today that would institute a broad definition of merit in its admissions process.

Currently, campuses are required to admit at least half of their students based purely on academic criteria — grades, scores, and classes taken. The proposal would allow such factors as athletics, community service and socioeconomic background to be considered as well.

Although critics say it would lower UC's standards, UC President Richard Atkinson said the "comprehensive review" process that he has recommended is similar to those used by elite private colleges and universities.

"We want to move away from a formula-driven admissions process, one that simply adds up numbers and looks at grades and test scores, to one that looks at the pattern of achievement, the interests of the students and the like," Atkinson said recently to members of the State Board of Education in Sacramento.

The new policy, which is being studied by the faculty, will come to the regents for final approval in November.

It would allow campuses not only to consider special talents

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# UC admissions policy again on regents' minds

## UC regents to debate 'comprehensive' admissions

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and interests, but also to evaluate all academic accomplishments in light of the applicant's socioeconomic background and academic opportunities. That would benefit students who have demonstrated initiative and promise by making the most of their educational opportunities, according to UC.

Even though many elite private schools do look at similar factors in admissions, critics say, UC is responsible to the public.

"People want some assurance that the process is predictable and that there is something objective against which their children will be measured," said Regent Ward Connerly, who was one of the architects of the state's 1996 voter-approved ban on affirmative action. "The fatal flaw is that this removes that level of objectivity."

He said the issue would open the university to lawsuits, espe-

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RICHARD ATKINSON  
University of California president

cially if admission of members of minority groups increases, because admissions decisions will be less defensible.

"You are injecting race into the equation through the back door," Connerly said.

UC has been struggling to in-

crease enrollment of underrepresented minorities at its two elite campuses — UC Berkeley and UCLA — without affirmative action.

Although UC Berkeley has adhered to the 50 percent rule, admitting half of each class on academics, since 1998 it has considered an applicant's achievement with regard to the opportunities that were available to them.

David Benjamin, who runs a test-preparation business in Irvine, said the comprehensive process used now by Berkeley makes it easier for certain ethnic groups to gain admission.

For example, in 2000, about 17 percent of African Americans with a 3.5 to 3.59 grade point

average were accepted to the freshman class. Chicanos with the same GPA were accepted at 8.3 percent rate. Only 4.6 percent of white applicants with that GPA were accepted and only 1.3 percent of Asians.

The same disparity shows up with SAT scores, where 1600 is a perfect score. While Latino and Chicano applicants who had a 900 to 999 SAT score were admitted at a 19 percent rate, white and Asian students had to score 1200 to 1299 to have the same chance at a slot in the freshman class.

"I could understand taking a small number of underprivileged students — but if the gaps are that big, then I start to think some-

thing is going on," Benjamin said. Admissions experts say that basing admissions decisions on numbers alone, however, does not necessarily yield a class that best serves the university or society.

"There are a number of people who apply with 1600 SATs and high GPAs who are not going to get in," said Roger Banks, senior admissions officer at Harvard University, which admitted 2,100 of about 19,000 applicants this year. "You have other students with modest standardized tests but who excel in other areas, athletics, music, journalism and attractive personal features."

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